

Commission Policy on Archery Season Intent and Equipment Evaluation Criteria

Whereas, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Fish and Wildlife Commission have the responsibility of providing hunting opportunities to multiple constituencies while governing hunting seasons to ensure the continued diversity, health, and security of game animals;

Whereas, the Department, Commission, and the bowhunting community have a collective interest in managing archery only season length, structure, and its methods and means in order to balance the impacts to game animals as well as social considerations such as tolerance of bowhunting by landowners, rifle hunters, and the general public;

Whereas, the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission has the authority to set policies for and approve department regulations for special seasons and methods and means of hunting;

Whereas, defining and controlling technology is crucial to managing both the biological and social impacts of bowhunting;

Therefore, the Commission establishes the following policy:

Montana Archery Season Intent, Bowhunting Principles, and Archery Equipment

Montana Archery Season Intent

Montana designed its archery only seasons to protect its unique bowhunting opportunities for the benefit of current and future hunters. Montana has a six-week archery only season plus multiple early and late-season hunts, providing one of the most extensive archery hunting opportunities in the nation. Montana possesses many highly coveted game species, several of which also have specific archery only seasons. Archery recruitment is robust, and participation has doubled each decade over the past thirty years. Bowhunting participation among Montana's women and youth exceeds the national average, thereby ensuring recruitment of future generations.

Montana has abundant and diverse statewide opportunities for mixed weapons adjacent to archery only season. These exist within the statewide Weapons Restriction Areas as well as during the five-week general season, early and late shoulder seasons, and game management hunts. These ancillary opportunities ensure the full inclusion of a broad constituency of hunters, including those with disabilities, women, youth, and older hunters. Hunters consistently express high satisfaction in the variety and quality of the hunting experiences within the state. The Montana bowhunting community expresses strong advocacy towards maintaining our current archery opportunities and promotes archery season as remaining separate from other methods and means.

Bowhunting Principles

Bowhunters must develop absolute proficiency with their equipment as well as the ability to get close enough for a shot through an intimate knowledge of the animal's habits and habitat. The National Bowhunter Education Foundation teaches bowhunters to limit their shots to responsible distances within the hunter's personal limitations and the limitations of the individual's bow. While bowhunting was historically subsistence in nature, in modern times it represents the apex of hunting challenge through the enhancement of one's woodsmanship capabilities and the deliberate limitation of equipment range.

Bowhunting is by definition a close-range sport which demands the highest fair chase ethic. The close-range, fair chase nature of bowhunting offers the animal the greatest opportunity to escape. In essence, bowhunting is the ultimate test of the skill and woodsmanship of the hunter. Montana's fair chase ethic mirrors the Boone & Crockett Club's position, "Fair chase is an approach that elevates the quality of the chase, the challenge, and experience above all else. By not overwhelming game species with human capabilities, fair chase helps define a hunter's engagement in conservation." According to the Pope & Young Club, fair chase principles dictate that the hunter is at the disadvantage and must hone the skills of discipline, patience, perseverance, and woodsmanship rather than reliance on equipment advancements in order to harvest animals. Fair chase depends on the concept that, more often than not, the animal will evade the hunter. This concept of fair chase is essential to bowhunting, and the challenges inherent to the sport are what make Montana's archery only seasons exceptional.

Montana's six-week bowhunting season was granted with the understanding that historical archery equipment was an effective means to ethically harvest game animals with minimal impact to the resource. Bowhunting was unique enough in its practices to warrant a distinct season of its own, demonstrating an acceptance that certain equipment restrictions were necessary in order to limit harvest rates. Montana's game management entities and our bowhunting community must carefully consider whether additional equipment is necessary to the bowhunting experience and whether advancement might threaten the opportunities provided during our six-week bowhunting season.

Archery Equipment

Montana has adopted a unique set of equipment regulations based upon the priorities of effective, ethical harvest, fair chase ideals, and minimal impact to the resource. These methods and means assure that Montana maintains the original focus of bowhunting as a challenging, close-range sport.

Current regulations state that a legal hunting bow shall be a longbow, flatbow, recurve, or compound bow designed to be shot vertically and at least 28 inches in total length. The bow must be hand-drawn and held by the shooter's own muscle power. The sole exception to this method is granted to physically disabled bowhunters, who are exempted from the requirement of holding

or shooting the bow with their hands through the Permit To Modify Archery Equipment. There is no minimum draw weight requirement in Montana, and compound bows of up to 80% let-off are legal, allowing for the fullest participation by youth, women, and older bowhunters. Montana does not allow crossbows during archery-only seasons, but they are legal for use in Weapons Restricted Areas and during general seasons as well as early and late-season hunts.

Arrows are the most important component in ensuring an effective, ethical kill. An arrow's effectiveness is dependent on the broadhead's cutting edge and the arrow's momentum upon reaching its target. For this reason, arrows and broadheads must meet specific minimum requirements. They must be at least 20 inches in length and no less than 300 grains. Broadheads must have at least two cutting edges, weigh no less than 70 grains, and must be at least 7/8 inches at the widest point. Arrows should be weighted and matched in relationship to the hunting bow's draw weight in order to effectively transfer sufficient energy to the arrow and achieve good penetration, thereby ensuring quick and humane kills. Montana does not allow electronics or luminous chemicals to be used on a bow or arrow during archery only seasons.

Archery Equipment Evaluation Process and Criteria Matrix

Proposals for archery equipment shall be submitted to the Department and Commission through the formal biennial Tentatives process. Proposals should include the reason for inclusion of the equipment and its potential impacts to archery only seasons. Proposals shall be submitted to the Department during the Tentatives scoping period for consideration as a formal proposal. The following evaluation criteria will be used by the Department and Commission in their decision to advance a proposal to the public comment period.

The goal of the evaluation criteria is to assist the Department and Commission in the assessment of equipment for suitability within archery only seasons. The matrix uses measurement criteria to determine the potential impacts to archery seasons and opportunities. In order to warrant consideration for public comment, equipment or devices must not change the close-range focus of archery seasons, provide unnecessary advantage to the hunter, or diminish the fair chase principles inherent to bowhunting. These criteria will aid the Department and Commission in their decision to recommend or decline equipment proposals for advancement to the Tentatives public comment period. Equipment must have four or more "no" responses (i.e. limited negative impact) in order to advance to public comment.

Archery Equipment Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Criteria	Yes/No	Potential Impacts
Does the equipment change the fundamental nature and intent of archery seasons as stated in the policy?		
Is the equipment likely to detract from the historical intent of Montana archery		

seasons, namely that the season was intended for high quality archery opportunity with relatively low harvest rates?		
Does the equipment challenge, contradict, or lessen Montana's principle of fair chase?		
Does equipment have the potential to increase effective range of harvest?		
Does this equipment have the potential to increase fish and game violations, such as shooting outside of legal shooting hours?		
Does the equipment have the potential to increase archery harvest such that it may result in increased bowhunter impact on the resource and increase the possibility of limited permits?		
Does the equipment have the potential to increase archery harvest such that the increased harvest either increases conflict among or within user groups or have other negative social implications such as diminished sportsman/ landowner relations?		